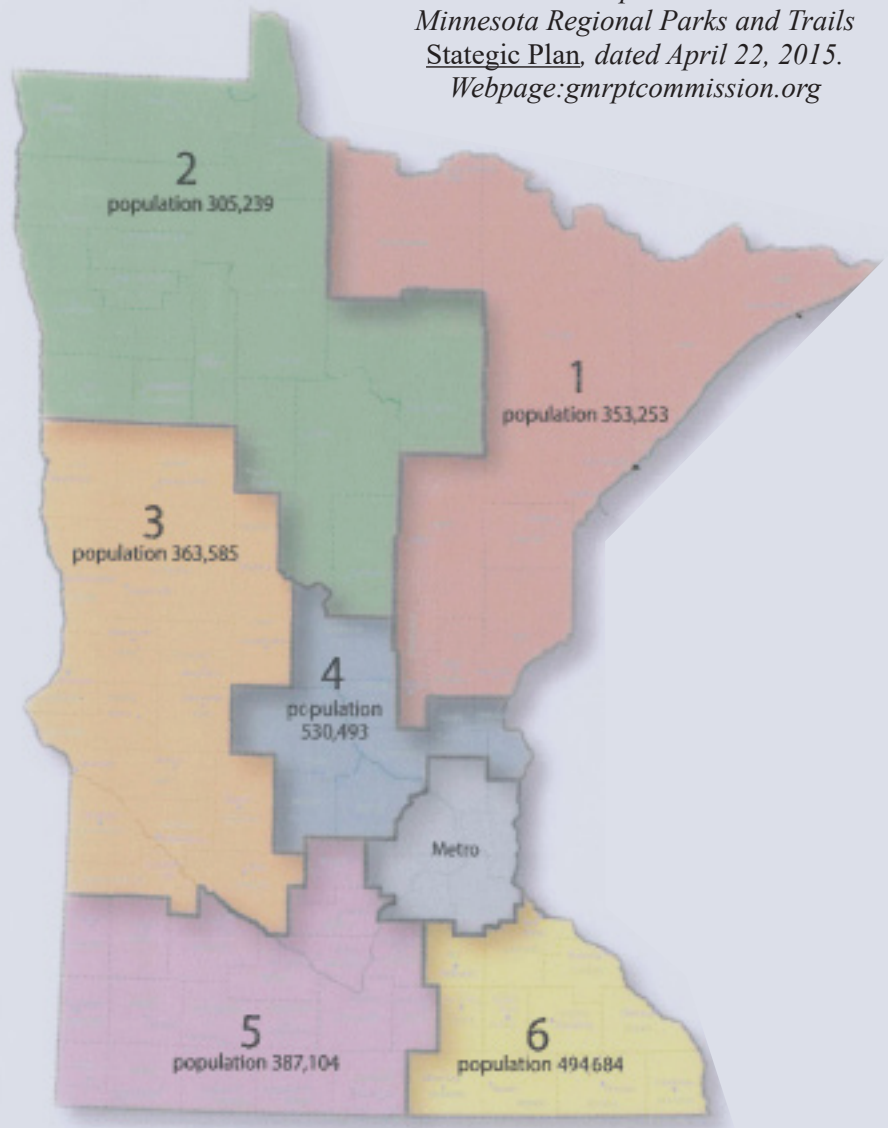


2016 GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS SYSTEM PLAN AND WORK PLAN

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION

*This Plan Complements Greater
Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails
Strategic Plan, dated April 22, 2015.
Webpage: gmrptcommission.org*



DISTRICT 1 – NORTHEAST



DISTRICT 2 – NORTHWEST



DISTRICT 3 – WEST CENTRAL



DISTRICT 4 – EAST CENTRAL



DISTRICT 5 – SOUTHWEST



DISTRICT 6 – SOUTHEAST

2016 GREATER MINNESOTA
REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS
SYSTEM PLAN AND WORK PLAN

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AND TRAILS COMMISSION

2016 Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails System Plan and Work Plan

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
Adopted 6/22/16

1. Plan Overview

Introduction

This is the second *System Plan* update by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (Commission) since its initial meeting in October, 2013. The plan describes the current regional parks and trails system and summarizes accomplishments to-date. The Commission's established webpage provides extensive information about GMRPTC and its activities, including a list of the Commissioners and key strategic and policy-level documents that complement this plan

Designated Regional Parks and Trails

As of June 1, 2016, 27 parks and trails have received regional designation. The designation process sets a high standard for a park or trail to achieve regional designation. Key steps include:

1. Submittal of applications for regional designation (limited to cities and counties in Greater Minnesota)
2. Review of applications following Commission protocols and evaluation criteria
3. Formal regional designation by the Commission for parks and trails meeting *Strategic Plan* criteria and all related requirements – including up-to-date master plans

Beginning in May 2016, master plans for all parks and trails must be uploaded or created directly within the new *Master Plan Portal* in the Data Management System (DMS) as a requirement of the designation process. *Only parks and trails meeting this requirement will be eligible for regional designation and funding through the Commission.* Cities and counties may submit a *Regional Designation Application* without a master plan, but only highly ranked parks and trails that include master plans are eligible for full evaluation and consideration for regional designation.

Designation-Pending Regional Parks and Trails

Designation-pending refers to parks and trails that have ranked high as potential designees, but have not met all of the application requirements. The most common issue is the lack of a master plan meeting the Commission's requirements.

As of June 1, 2016, there are 27 parks and trails with designation-pending status. When designation submittal requirements are met, the Commission further evaluates a park or trail for formal regional designation following established protocol. Parks and trails become eligible to submit funding requests only after receiving regional designation.

Status of Regional Parks and Trails System Development and Funding Allocations

After three designation application cycles, the Commission has received 220 applications (2014: 92, 2015: 85, 2016: 43) of which 54 have received "designated" or "designation-pending" status. The Commission has diversified the geographic distribution of applications across the regional system. Targeted approaches to training and new application tools have helped smaller and less experienced jurisdictions develop park and trail concepts that are on par with larger, better staffed and funded jurisdictions that had strong initial success. Ongoing outreach and support, as well as the strategic development initiatives outlined in this plan, will help ensure that the system will be balanced and equitable.

The Commission is focused on managing the growth of the regional system to ensure that each park or trail is well-vetted and of enduring value to Minnesotans. "Right-sizing" the system is critical to the Commission given the realities of limited funding over time.

To-date, the Commission has received 31 funding requests. All funding requests were evaluated against criteria and principles defined in the *Strategic Plan*, including:

- **Classification criteria** – provide a high-quality destination; well-located to serve regional population and/or tourist destination; enhance connectivity; and/or fill a gap in recreational opportunity
- **Four Legacy strategic directions** – connect people to the outdoors; acquire land, create opportunities; take care of what we have; coordinate among partners
- **Guiding principles and themes** – complementary to above; with additional focus on projects most relevant to and valued by residents and visitors, and those that foster economic development in Greater Minnesota

A total of 24 funding requests met the funding criteria and were recommended to the legislature for funding, one of which is being funded over a two-year period. The main theme for the 2016 and 2017 fiscal years funding cycles was to select "*Legacy-worthy*" projects of enduring value to Greater Minnesota residents and visitors.

The total amount of grants awarded:

- 2016 – \$8,046,550
- 2017 – \$8,445,175
- Total – \$16,491,725

All funding requests were evaluated and put into one of four categories:

- **High value top priority projects** – these match up well against evaluation protocol and are ready-to-go; 19 projects fall into this category
- **High value top priority projects – *prototype*** – these relate to select master planning, programming and development-related funding requests that would be test cases (i.e., working examples) to determine the value of supporting these types of investments in future years; four projects fall into this category

Funding requests listed in the above categories are the priorities for the 2016 and 2017 funding cycles. All remaining funding requests were put into one of the following categories:

- **Worthy projects** – these match up well against evaluation protocol, but are either not ready-to-go and/or are less of a priority than top listed projects
- **Other projects** – these do not rise to a level to be considered for funding

Organization Development and Related Accomplishments

The Commission continues to make great strides in creating an enduring professional organization to oversee the development of the regional parks and trails system in Greater Minnesota. Key organizational accomplishments during the 2016 fiscal year include:

- **Established Executive Director position** – this is key milestone that ensures day-to-day leadership and guiding the evolving organization

- **Continued development of Data Management System (DMS)** – to establish consistent processes and managing information; Key areas of system development include:
 - *Designation Application* – continued refinement of the application
 - *Designation Application Review* portal – allows ETeam to systematically evaluate applications against established criteria and requirements
 - *Funding Request* Portal – allows cities and counties with designated parks and trails to formally submit a funding request
 - *Master Plan* portal – cities and counties will upload or create master plans within the DMS, which will vastly improve consistency and access to information for all parks and trails across the system; development of master plans will be supported by workshops
- **Established *Funding Request Evaluation and Prioritizing Protocol*** – establishes the basis for selecting funding priorities from the funding requests
- **Submitted first-ever funding recommendations** – for fiscal years 2016 and 2017
- **Continued development of a dedicated website** – to serve as the information center for all GMRPTC activities
- **Initial development of a research portfolio** (made available through the website) – to aggregate trends research, demographic information and performance measurements tools for use by the Commission and cities and counties in developing master plans
- **Continued refinement of District Planning Committees (DPCs) role in planning** – including:
 - Statewide gathering to share ideas, develop strategies and define regional similarities, uniqueness, and nuances
 - Creation of first-ever *District Work Plans* – which helps define the nuances, gaps and strategies unique to each of the districts
 - Workshops to discuss planning issues and DMS development
- **Application workshops** – to assist prospective regional designation applicants in understanding the application process and related requirements, and to introduce the new Master Plan portal (*which is the only one of its kind, and available to any city or county who wants to do a master plan for a park or trail*)
- **Updated *Strategic Plan*** – to reflect changing circumstances
- **Refined Evaluation Team (ETeam) role** – to help enhance the application process and solicitation of quality applications for regional parks and trails by providing feedback to the Commission

Connecting People to the Outdoors and Programming

Connecting people to the outdoors, one of the Legacy pillars, is a key strategic issue the Commission is increasingly focusing on. Key aspects of this entails: 1) removing barriers to participation, 2) providing the right facilities in the right places, 3) providing engaging programs, 4) effectively marketing offerings, and 5) measuring performance.

A Commission subcommittee has been established and is developing a plan around this issue that will be incrementally implemented over time. As defined in 3. *District-Level Strategic Directions*, the Commission is pursuing a variety of new prototype initiatives targeted at connecting people to the outdoors. As a starting point, the Commission is funding a two-year prototype program for an Outdoor Recreation/Environmental Program specialist as a partnership between Wright and Stearns Counties. If successful, this type of program may be used as a model for other districts.

Engaging a wide cross-section of user groups in this process is a priority to discover new ways to connect people to the outdoors. This includes traditional users and advocacy groups, along with emerging groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), minority-focused groups, etc. that can provide useful perspectives on this complex issue.

2. Key Strategic Directions

Overview

The Commission is at a transition point: Shifting from the role of taking in applications and judging their regional significance to a more active role in planning a cohesive system that responds to the unique circumstances of each district. The goal is to ensure – over time – that all regions of the state receive a high level of service based on the particular needs of each district. Integrating the regional parks and trails system with state and local systems is also a key goal to maximize public values and minimize duplication.

Key themes include:

- **Creating forwarding-looking system and district plans** – that ensure:
 - All districts are important and play unique role in the system
 - All districts have equal footing as being part of the system
 - All districts have equal access to support (from the Commission) so that any local-level planning limitations do not preclude discovering high-value regional opportunities and meeting regional needs
- **Being ambitious in:**
 - Defining gaps in meeting regionally-defined needs – physical infrastructure, programming, and support services distinct to each district
 - Seeking innovative opportunities
 - Enhancing outreach and research to discover new trends and emerging ideas
 - Implementing performance measurement tools to assess the value of investments made into the system over time
 - Being proactive on all initiatives – work collaboratively with partners where possible to maximize limited resources and best serve our constituents

Seeking Multiple Public Values from Regional Parks and Trails

The Commission is committed to advancing multiple public values through the regional parks and trails system, including:

- **Recreational opportunities** – the core purpose of providing regional parks and trails
- **Economic development** – attracting park and trail users from the region (and visitors from outside Minnesota) provides a direct economic benefit to the communities hosting these assets; providing park and trail amenities enhances the quality of life, strengthens the appeal of communities and encourages in-migration to Greater Minnesota
- **Tourism** – Minnesota is a global travel destination and much of that appeal is the scenic beauty and natural surroundings offered in Greater Minnesota; regional parks and trails, in concert with marketing and promotion, extends the visitor reach beyond state borders and generates greater interest and use of the system; visitors do not limit their experience to the park or trail alone, spending dollars in communities for food, lodging, gas and retail products – which in turn creates/maintains employment and generates sales tax revenue
- **Health and Wellness** – to provide the opportunity for residents and visitors to live healthy lives and improve sense of wellbeing
- **Intrinsic** – the appreciation of the natural landscapes, parks and trails as being part of the quality of life in Greater Minnesota

Each of these values are key factors as the Commission plans the regional system, determines best use of investments, and measures the performance of those investments to inform future priorities.

Recreational Trends Influencing Strategic Directions

Expanding participation in outdoor recreation continues to be a core challenge facing all park agencies – particularly with younger age groups and minorities. Building for the future requires recognizing challenges and accommodating evolving trends and changing participation patterns in outdoor recreation. The Commission’s forward-looking approach – coupled with sound planning practices and well-targeted investments – will ensure that the regional system in Greater Minnesota will effectively compete for people’s recreational time and leave them with rewarding, life-enriching experiences.

Key trends and challenges to increasing participation in outdoor activities:

- **Common barriers to participation**, including:
 - Lack of awareness of a facility or program
 - “Technological recreation” is taking over the larger percentages of youth (and adult) free time, with “virtual reality” experience being used as a surrogate for real outdoor experiences
 - Time management issues
 - Lack of adult desire (habit) to participate and lack of parents influencing children to play in the outdoors
 - No desire, or want more comforts and conveniences
 - Lack of transportation
 - Entry fees and other costs
 - Fear factors – weather, ticks, mosquitoes, wild animals
 - Lack of awareness of cultural or religious needs
- **Getting young people outdoors more is especially challenging** – ideas include:
 - Better quality facilities
 - Lowering entry fees for parks and outdoor activities
 - Expanding programming opportunities – especially entry-level experiences
 - Providing reliable access to wifi, etc.
 - Reinforcing the value of the outdoors to parents
 - Integrating the outdoors in school curricula and other youth organizations
 - Improving marketing efforts and coordination across agencies

Strategic Initiatives and Prototypes

Along with overseeing the regional designation application process, the Commission is undertaking select strategic initiatives and prototypes to advance planning within each district and the system as a whole. Strategic initiatives address a specific *planning* need. At the system level, this includes the key initiatives defined in this section and *5. System-Wide Planning Initiatives*. District-level strategic initiatives are defined in *3. District-Level Strategic Direction*.

Prototypes are *development* or *program*- related and refer to an “original” or “first model” that the Commission is using to test a project to determine its merit, and potential use elsewhere in the system. This approach allows the Commission to be proactive and progressive in testing new ideas or approaches that add value to the regional system that might otherwise be missed.

The 2016/2017 funding recommendations included four prototype projects. For each strategic initiative or prototype, the Commission will establish an evaluation protocol to assess outcomes and the merit of the initiative, its value-added benefit, and (if proven successful) its potential use elsewhere in the system.

System-Wide Strategic Directions

Main Theme: GMRPTC is at a point of transition: Shifting from the role of establishing the organization and judging the regional significance of designation applications to a more active role in planning a cohesive system that responds to the unique circumstances of each district. The goal is to ensure – over time – that all regions of the state receive a high level of service consistent with the particular needs of each district.

Complementary themes guiding the Commission's strategies:

- **Create vibrant regional “destination” parks and trails** – by taking full advantage of site opportunities through informed planning and creative design – not just another park or trail with the usual set of amenities
- **Create novel user experiences to initially encourage people to visit the park or trail; provide quality experiences to keep them coming back time and again**; the goal is to create memorable experiences, and each design aspect needs to be evaluated through this spectrum
- **Position well-located parks or trails as regional “cornerstone” amenities** – and an integral part of the larger local and regional public infrastructure that fosters all of the public values previously defined

Projects funded in 2016/2017 will add considerable value to the regional system in Greater Minnesota. These investments immediately pave the way to connect more people to the outdoors and increase participation in outdoor activities. Looking forward, *the Commission's investment strategy will remain dynamic and responsive to new information about gaps in service and evolving regional needs*. Working with its District Planning Committees (DPCs), the Commission will continue to respond to the nuanced needs and opportunities within each of the six districts. In doing so, investments made over time to the regional system will continue to be well-targeted and of high value relative to the priorities established for each of the districts.

Key strategic directions include:

- **Continuing development of the Data Management System (DMS)** – to ensure:
 - Consistent information gathering and access for all users
 - Effective system planning
 - Informed decision making at all levels
- **Continuing refinement of the designation application process** – this remains a primary tool to identifying regional opportunities within each district; the goal is to foster high quality proposals through outreach and information sharing
- **Continuing strategic assessment of each district** – to define a specific strategy for each district; factors include:
 - Gaps in service
 - Geographical gaps
 - Types of amenities gaps
 - Gaps in understanding and accommodating dynamic populations
 - Gaps in understanding and accommodating changing recreational needs and trends
 - Limitations of – or need for refining – existing classifications and evaluation criteria to address service gaps and park/trail opportunities of regional importance that are unique to Greater Minnesota
 - Rehabilitation and repair needs – of regionally-designated existing parks and trails that are in disrepair, substandard or in need of redesign to meet current needs
- **Advancing Commission's role in planning the regional system** – at the state-wide and district level; targeted items include:
 - Expanding role in outreach – including targeted outreach at the district level
 - Focusing the role of DPCs – to be effective partners in district planning; also foster more diversity to bring in new ideas
 - Encourage quality, well-informed designation applications through workshops and outreach – to ensure park and trail outcomes address defined regional needs
 - Aiding cities and counties in addressing cross-jurisdictional issues – i.e., establishing partnerships, understanding governance models, creating joint-powers agreements
 - Fostering high quality master plans by providing guidance in:
 - Meeting master plan requirements
 - Understanding trends, quality outcomes, etc.
 - Developing phasing plans and formulating funding requests

- **Advancing performance measurement and research initiatives** – to ensure that investments made are of measurable value; includes:
 - Putting into practice the framework defined in the *Strategic Plan*, starting with developing a visitor count methodology
 - Continuous enhancement of depth of research available through the website to catalog and display information in a convenient place
 - Defining facility standards to ensure quality – ranging from accessibility requirements to width of trails

Specific system-wide strategic planning initiatives are defined under *5.Planning Initiatives and Prototypes*. Specific system-wide performance measurement and research initiatives are defined under *6.Performance Measurement and Research Initiatives*.

Legacy Funding Authority: Responsibility for legacy funding authority will also progress over the next biennium. By mutual agreement, MN DNR’s role for FY 2016 and FY 2017 has transitioned to grant administration, and the agency was not directly involved in project selection. Going forward, GMRPTC will take on more direct responsibility for grant allocations and, ultimately, administration. The pace of this transition will be based on organizational capacity and determination by the Commission the most effective way forward between the two entities.

District-Level Strategic Direction

This system plan establishes the *initial* steps in creating district-level system plans that respond to the unique circumstances of a given district. Each district is starting from a different planning context with widely varying needs, opportunities, and priorities. The goal is three-fold:

- Continued refinement of district-level planning protocols tailored to each district that can be built upon in subsequent years
- Establish a planning benchmark for each district
- Implement select strategic initiatives within each district that address defined needs and make tangible headway into addressing planning issues

Strategic initiatives and prototypes *for each district* include some combination of the following:

- **Project prototype (to be funded in the FY 2018/2019 funding cycle)** – a development project, program or unique initiative that addresses an emerging need and adds discernable value to the regional system
- **Planning initiative** that emerged from the DPC work plans and/or Commission discussion that address a planning need
- **Outreach initiative** – to expand knowledge of trends and recreational demands, and to bring new people and broader perspectives into the planning discussion
- **Trail corridor initiative** – work with partners to define corridor opportunities and develop a comprehensive district-level plan for the development of a sustainable trail system (this is a common work plan item across all districts)

The District Planning Committees (DPCs) – established to assist the Commission on system planning within each of the districts – will take an active role in supporting the initiatives being undertaken in their districts. The specific initiatives proposed or underway for each district are defined under *3. District Level Strategic Directions*. (Note that initiatives may evolve and change as the system plan is implemented due to unforeseen issues or new insights learned along the way.)

System-Wide Outreach and Programming Strategy

As noted in the planning overview, connecting people to the outdoors is a key strategic initiative. To better understand this issue, the Commission is undertaking a variety of steps at the district level (as defined under *3. District-Level Strategic Directions*) to test ideas and programs. As these are completed, the Commission will be better informed on how to best approach this complex issue at the system-wide planning level.

The Commission will continue to expand its *social media outreach*.

Future Planning Considerations

An increasingly important point of focus is ensuring that the regional system will be balanced between districts, function as a cohesive whole, and is of a size and scale that can be sustained. A robust system is envisioned, but one that is also achievable in terms of project funding, rehabilitation and repair in the long term. Ensuring that the regional system complements, not duplicates, state and local park and trail systems will also be a point of focus.

As the system evolves, managing expectations about how big the system can get and being more definitive in what is a regional versus a local or state park or trail will become a more pressing issue – to which the Commission is already paying attention. Measuring the performance of investments over time will be important to ensure enduring public value.

The relationship between the Commission, other public land owners and sovereign nations (e.g., American Indian communities) needs to be more clearly defined as district plans evolve. This includes recognizing opportunities and limitations to collaborate on facilities, programming and marketing.

3. District-Level Strategic Directions

The following defines the strategic direction for each district, consistent with 2. *Key Strategic Directions*. The focus under this *initial* step is for GMRPTC to undertake select initiatives that will test ideas and create outcomes that have short and long-term value.

Note: See appendix for statewide and district system plan maps and demographic information.

District 1

District Overview/Planning Context

A main characteristic of this district is the extent of public land and large natural resource base that already exists. Coupled with state and local-level parks, recreational access to natural open space is extensive – albeit much of the non-park land is largely undeveloped for recreational uses. How to best take advantage of the lands already in the public domain for regional-level park and trail uses is as or more important than adding “traditional” regional parks and trails. Making connections between land resources and coordinating regional initiatives with state and local agencies to maximize the public values of these common resources is a central theme shaping the initial planning of this district.

Addressing the gaps in service and defining regional-level opportunities in Koochiching County and the southern counties is of special concern, with a number of these counties being under-represented thus far in the planning process.

Getting a handle on the many unknowns in this district is a primary focus. How to best accommodate the demand for motorized trails is a prevalent planning issue, as is the case with understanding the demand for mountain bike trails. Accommodating “extreme sports” by providing facilities and/or staging events may be an untapped tourism opportunity that needs to be evaluated, as does the potential reuse of mine pits for recreation. Understanding how the Superior Hiking Trails fits into the regional framework is also a concern of the DPC and Commission

One of the main challenges in this district is the limited capacity or history of many of these cities and counties to prepare system or master plans for local parks and trails that may be regionally significant. Determining how GMRPTC can best foster this effort and coordinate amongst local partners is a key strategic concern for the district.

Strategic Initiatives for this District

The DPC work plan and past Commission discussions identified a multitude of district-level planning needs, priorities, gaps and strategies of merit. Out of the many possibilities, the Commission defined the following strategic initiatives and prototypes as priorities for this district:

- **Duluth-area regional planning** – collaborate/coordinate with Duluth and adjoining communities on regional opportunities and approaches, along with timing of seeking regional designation for various parks and trails in the greater Duluth area
- **Prospector Trail** – high prospect trail to help address the demand for well-designed motorized trails; start with fully assessing the merits of this trail as a state or regional facility, and then determining GMRPTC’s role in funding the project in partnership with other to-be defined partners.
- **Superior Hiking Trail** – work with local trail advocates, MN DNR, and local cities and counties to determine roles and responsibilities for developing and managing this highly regarded trail; specifically determine if this is a state, regional, local, or non-profit based trail, and what role, if any, GMRPTC has in providing funding
- Mountain bike trails – work with local advocacy groups and cities to better define the demand for mountain bike trails along the Northshore, from Duluth north, including Superior National Forest

In concert with these initiatives, the DPC and Commission will continue to refine the district work plan, along with participating in system-wide planning activities. Fostering high quality applications for regional designation will also remain a focus. The Commission may also add new initiatives to the list as the current projects are completed or opportunities arise.

Outreach and Programming Strategy for this District

In addition to system-wide outreach efforts, the Commission is focusing on better engaging under-represented counties in the planning process in this district – especially Koochiching County and the southern counties with smaller populations and less-defined regional centers. The DPC will be part of helping define more specifically which counties and groups need direct contact from GMRPTC, and how to best go about this.

At this point, no clear programming opportunity has been identified for this district. This will be a point of emphasis as part of GMRPTC’s refines it “connecting people to the outdoors” strategy.

District 2

District Overview

District 2 has similar public land characteristics as District 1, albeit the character of the landscapes and nuances of regional opportunities are unique to the district. The extent of public land and large natural resource base remains a dominant characteristic and backdrop for regional park and trail planning. Some state and local parks and trails provide important developed recreational access to natural open space, but a comprehensive assessment of these is still just getting underway. Many of the less populated cities and counties have no or few local parks or trails, which in turn limit the prospects for these entities to consider, much less submit, quality applications for regional designation.

As with District 1, leveraging the lands already in the public domain to address regional-level park and trail needs is as or more important than defined “traditional” regional parks and trails. Here too, making connections between land resources and coordinating regional initiatives with state and local agencies to maximize the public values of these common resources is a central theme shaping the planning of the district. In addition, the nuances of this district will likely require using non-traditional approaches to providing regional amenities, as long as GMRPTC’s requirements for regional significance can be achieved. One of the under-realized recreational opportunities in this (and other) district is “wildlife recreation,” which needs to be both defined and addressed as part of developing a district-level system plan.

Addressing the gaps in service and defining regional-level opportunities in the less populated counties is of special concern, with a number of these counties being under-represented thus far in the planning process. Getting a handle on the many unknowns of this district is a primary focus, as is striving to be inclusive in the planning process to ensure all populations have a chance to be heard. As with District 1, how to best accommodate the demand for motorized trails is a prevalent planning issue.

Strategic Initiatives for this District

The DPC work plan and past Commission discussions identified a multitude of district-level planning needs, priorities, gaps and strategies of merit. Out of the many possibilities, the Commission defined the following strategic initiatives and prototypes as priorities for this district:

- **Motorized trail planning framework** – work with advocacy groups and other partners (MN DNR) to define the demand for motorized trails, and then establish a framework to comprehensively address this issue, including defining regional and state roles in providing motorized trails
- **Bemidji-area regional planning** – collaborate/coordinate with Bemidji area on regional opportunities in and around the city; particular focus on the lakeside park and trail amenities, and interconnections with state parks and trails
- **Brainerd Lakes Area regional planning** – collaborate/coordinate with cities and counties encompassing Gull Lake, Nisswa, Brainerd, Crosby, etc. on regional opportunities; particular focus on regional amenities that are not traditional parks or trails but are of regional significance; also, interconnectedness with state parks and trails, including the Cuyuna Lakes Trail and Cuyuna Country SRA mountain bike trail system
- **Wildlife recreation** – define infrastructure needed to support wildlife recreation (e.g., wildlife viewing station), along with defining outreach, programming and marketing needed to promote opportunities for wildlife observation

In concert with these initiatives, the DPC and Commission will continue to refine the district work plan, along with participating in system-wide planning activities. Fostering high quality applications for regional designation will also remain a focus. The Commission may also add new initiatives to the list as the current projects are completed or opportunities arise.

Outreach and Programming Strategy for this District

In addition to system-wide outreach efforts, the Commission is focusing on better engaging under-represented counties in the planning process in this district. The DPC will be part of helping define more specifically which counties and groups need direct contact from GMRPTC, and how to best go about this.

District 3

District Overview

The many lakes found across District 3 are predominant landscape and recreational features. Agriculture is the predominant land use, with the extent of publicly-owned forested lands much less than in districts 1 and 2. I-94 and Highway 10 are the major corridors connecting visitors to the lakes region and many of the small communities in the district.

Small towns are spread out across the district, with the lakes area between Alexandria and Detroit Lakes being the core recreational draw. The cities in the lakes area are the primary regional centers, albeit of a smaller scale than regional centers in other districts with larger populations. Moorhead is a notable regional center on the northwest side of the district, and Willmar is a notable but smaller regional center on the southern end of this district.

Addressing the gaps in service and defining regional-level opportunities in the district where populations are clustered in smaller cities is a core challenge. Defining the regional park and trail opportunities in the southern counties in this district is especially important, as is taking advantage of the Minnesota River corridor for recreational purposes (as is the case with District 5).

Connectivity of trail systems is a core planning issue, as is defining how parks in smaller towns (that often serve as regional centers) factor into the regional framework. How shorter trails and local parks fit into the regional framework is an important issue given the many smaller towns within the district. The Willmar area is a case in point, where regional amenities are lacking but how to best address that need remains uncertain. The same holds true at the county level, where some regional opportunities have been identified but not extensively vetted. With few exceptions, like Douglas County, most counties do not have current parks and trails system plans.

Strategic Initiatives for this District

The DPC work plan and past Commission discussions identified a multitude of district-level planning needs, priorities, gaps and strategies of merit. Out of the many possibilities, the Commission defined the following strategic initiatives and prototypes as priorities for this district:

- **Heartland Trail corridor planning** – collaborate with local communities and advocacy groups to explore how the trail can enhance connectivity between communities along its length, and determine development priorities; also determine if this trail should be classified as a regional or state trail, and what that means in terms of development funding, operations, and maintenance
- **Willmar area regional park and trail planning** –to better understand how to address regional needs at the city level where “traditional” regional park opportunities are limited or even non-existent
- **Detroit Mountain Master Plan planning assistance** – collaborate/coordinate with local cities and county to ensure that the master plan for this and adjoining areas is comprehensive and addresses regional criteria; goal is to ensure that regional opportunities are maximized
- **Minnesota River Valley (Districts 3 and 5)** – host meeting with cities and counties along the corridor, MN DNR, RDCs and advocacy groups to determine the real potential of the valley for recreation (i.e., land and water based trails, wildlife viewing, fishing, etc.); includes assembling existing plans for the corridor; and then establish a comprehensive approach to master planning the corridor if merit is established

In concert with these initiatives, the DPC and Commission will continue to refine the district work plan, along with participating in system-wide planning activities. Fostering high quality applications for regional designation will also remain a focus. The Commission may also add new initiatives to the list as the current projects are completed or opportunities arise.

Outreach and Programming Strategy for this District

In addition to system-wide outreach efforts, the Commission is focusing on better engaging under-represented cities and counties in the planning process in this district. Outreach to the many smaller communities is a particular point of focus (targeted areas include, but not limited to, Willmar and Kandiyohi and Renville Counties). The DPC will be part of helping define more specifically which cities and groups need direct contact from GMRPTC, and how to best go about this.

District 4

District Overview

District 4 is the smallest district in geographic size, with much of its population concentrated along the Interstate 94 corridor from the metro area through the greater St. Cloud area. The cities and counties associated with the larger regional centers have more established park and trail system plans – with a number of these currently being updated as the regional designation process evolves across the district. The smaller cities and counties outside the core regional centers have fewer identified regional-level park and trail opportunities, which is one of the challenges facing this district. The smaller cities and less populated counties also have less capacity to plan for parks and trails than the larger regional centers, which poses a constraint on identifying opportunities for regional consideration.

Addressing the gaps in service and defining regional-level opportunities in the less populated parts of the district is a core challenge. As with other districts, this underscores the need for continued outreach and an active role in planning. It also provides the opportunity to define how the experience and resources of the larger cities and counties can be leveraged to aid the smaller ones (with fewer resources) to ensure that a comprehensive and balanced district-level regional system plan that benefits all emerges.

Another core challenge is ensuring that regional components of individual city or county parks and trails systems are complementary (and not duplicative) when considered in the regional context. This is especially this case with trails, where the connectivity between local trails and the overall extent of the regional system is a major planning issue.

Strategic Initiatives for this District

The DPC work plan and past Commission discussions identified a multitude of district-level planning needs, priorities, gaps and strategies of merit. Out of the many possibilities, the Commission defined the following strategic initiatives and prototypes as priorities for this district:

- **Regional trail system plan** – collaborate/coordinate with local cities and counties to create an initial regional trail system plan to ensure connectivity between city, county and state trails; use as prototype to determine which trails meet regional standards, how local and regional trails interlink to create a system, and to establish both regional and local trail development priorities to maximize public values; includes consideration of connections with Metro Regional Parks and Trails (e.g., Crow River Regional Trail could be a prototype project); also includes defining gaps in trails, especially the counties that currently do not have any planned trails
- **Soo Line Trail/Great Northern Trail** – host meeting with impacted cities and counties to determine the real potential of these corridors to become regional trails, and then establish a more comprehensive master planning process if merit is established
- **Swimming beach opportunities** – investigate opportunities to provide more developed facilities to address a defined demand throughout the district; includes defining if this type of facility needs to be part of a regional park, or can it be a standalone special feature regional amenity; if successful, this could serve as a model for other districts to consider

In concert with these initiatives, the DPC and Commission will continue to refine the district work plan, along with participating in system-wide planning activities. Fostering high quality applications for regional designation will also remain a focus. The Commission may also add new initiatives to the list as the current projects are completed or opportunities arise.

Outreach and Programming Strategy for this District

In addition to system-wide outreach efforts, the Commission is focusing on better engaging under-represented entities in the planning process in this district. A couple of prototype initiatives are being pursued:

- **Small communities outreach** – develop and implement strategy to engage under-represented cities and counties in the planning process (targeted areas include, but not limited to, Meeker and Sherburne Counties)
- **Outdoor Recreation Council** – create a council focusing on connecting people to the outdoors and increasing participation in outdoor activities; particular focus on youth involvement; also links with other research and performance measurement initiatives being undertaken by GMRPTC; involve LAC in developing this concept to ensure consistency with larger Legacy program

The DPC will be part of helping define more specifically which cities and groups need direct contact from GMRPTC, and how to best go about this.

District 5

District Overview

District 5 is rural and agricultural in character, with a historic landscape of open prairie, oak savanna, potholes, and river corridors. Compared to the northern districts, state lands and forests are limited outside of the state parks and river corridors. Over time, some state land units have been deactivated, and whether or not these lands have a regional purpose needs to be assessed. The river corridors are important landscape features that need to be part of the regional system.

Other than Mankato, regional centers are smaller and more spread out in District 5, characteristic of the rural setting. The potential interface between regional parks and trails in Minnesota and the regional centers in neighboring states need to be assessed to determine if there is mutual benefit in connecting systems, and the cost-benefit of doing so.

Lacking public lands, establishing cross-country paved trail routes is a significant challenge for this district, underscoring the importance of taking advantage of the Minnesota River corridor for recreational purposes. Finding interesting routes along roadways is also a core challenge in the district. Lack of trail system connectivity is an interrelated issue.

Meeting the recreational needs of the burgeoning minority population in the district poses new regional park and trail planning opportunities and challenges. Developing outdoor recreation programs that appeal to minority groups and entice them to develop life-long participation habits is a core challenge in this district. Transportation to facilities is an access barrier issue for many of these groups, and the population in general.

As with the other districts, there is a wide range of local level capability to participate in regional planning activities, such as preparing designation applications and master plans. Leveraging the planning capabilities of the Commission, larger cities and counties, colleges and universities, and regional planning entities will be vital to ensuring the regional opportunities in this district are discovered and a cohesive “right-sized” system emerges.

Strategic Initiatives for this District

The DPC work plan and past Commission discussions identified a multitude of district-level planning needs, priorities, gaps and strategies of merit. Out of the many possibilities, the Commission defined the following strategic initiatives and prototypes as priorities for this district:

- **Casey Jones Trail corridor planning** – collaborate with local communities and advocacy groups to explore how the trail can enhance connectivity between communities along its length, and determine development priorities; also determine if this trail should be classified as a regional or state trail, and what that means in terms of development funding, operations, and maintenance
- **Minnesota River Valley (Districts 3 and 5)** – host meeting with cities and counties along the corridor, MN DNR, RDCs and advocacy groups to determine the real potential of the valley for recreation (i.e., land and water based trails, wildlife viewing, fishing, etc.); includes assembling existing plans for the corridor; and then establish a comprehensive approach to master planning the corridor if merit is established
- **Regional park opportunities assessment** – assemble work group (DPC and select others) to systematically identify regional park opportunities across the district that may have been missed by the designation application process; in addition to identifying missed opportunities, the goal is to better understand the extent of missed opportunities after 3 rounds of applications, and define the causes (e.g., lack of staff, not understanding the process, etc.); includes defining the value of deactivated land unit that were in the state lands system, and what role, if any, those lands might have in the regional system

In concert with these initiatives, the DPC and Commission will continue to refine the district work plan, along with participating in system-wide planning activities. Fostering high quality applications for regional designation will also remain a focus. The Commission may also add new initiatives to the list as the current projects are completed or opportunities arise.

Outreach and Programming Strategy for this District

In addition to system-wide outreach efforts, the Commission is focusing on better engaging under-represented cities and counties in the planning process in this district. Outreach to the diverse minority populations is a particular point of focus (targeted areas include, but are not limited to, Worthington and Marshall). A prototype initiative for this district is developing a test program to enhance participation of minority youth in outdoor recreation. The DPC will help define more specifically which cities and groups need direct contact from GMRPTC, and how to best go about this. The DPC will also work to help define the programming prototype initiative and oversee its implementation.

District 6

District Overview

District 6 has much of its population concentrated in the greater Rochester area. Rochester and Olmsted County have the more established park and trail system plans – with each of these currently being updated as the regional designation process evolves across the district. The smaller cities and counties outside the core regional centers have fewer identified regional-level park and trail opportunities, which is one of the challenges facing this district. The smaller cities and less populated counties also have less capacity to plan for parks and trails than the larger regional centers, which poses a constraint on identifying opportunities for regional consideration.

Addressing the gaps in service and defining regional-level opportunities in the less populated parts of the district is a core challenge. As with other districts, this underscores the need for continued outreach and an active role by the Commission in regional planning. Another core challenge is ensuring that regional components of individual city or county parks and trails systems are complementary (and not duplicative) when considered in the regional system context. This is especially the case with trails, where the connectivity between local, county and state trails and the overall extent of the emerging regional system is well planned by GMRPTC and other partners.

The interrelationship of regional-level parks in the Rochester and Olmsted County area is especially important since these systems will need to be well-coordinated as the regional population grows. The “visitor corridors” associated with Highway 52 (between the Metro and Rochester areas) and I-35 are also important regional planning considerations.

The opportunity to more fully realize the recreational potential of the many water ways in the district is also a point of focus by the DPC and Commission.

Strategic Initiatives for this District

The work plan prepared by the DPC and past discussions by the Commission have identified a multitude of district-level planning needs, priorities, gaps and strategies of merit. Out of the many possibilities, the Commission defined the following *prototype* strategic initiatives as priorities for this district:

- **Regional trail system plan** – collaborate/coordinate with local cities and counties to create an initial regional trail system plan to ensure connectivity between city, county and state trails; use as prototype to determine which trails meet regional standards, how local and regional trails interlink to create a system, and to establish both regional and local trail development priorities to maximize public values; includes consideration of connections with Metro regional trails; involve regional groups like SMART (Southeast Minnesota Association of Regional Trails) and CEDA (Community and Economic Development Association) in the process
- **Southern Minnesota Water Trail** – collaborate/coordinate with cities (up to 10) and counties along three rivers (Cannon, Zumbro, and Root Rivers) to better define opportunity for an 80 to 100 mile water trail, then establish a work plan to create a master plan; includes collaboration with MN DNR Trails and Waterways, as warranted; this initiative serves as an “on-the-ground” part of the larger system-wide study defined under 5. *Planning Initiatives and Prototypes*

- **Regional park density** – focuses on better understanding how many regional parks are justified within a given geographical area, which helps further the discussion about what “right-sizing” really means

In concert with these initiatives, the DPC and Commission will continue to refine the district work plan, along with participating in system-wide planning activities. Fostering high quality applications for regional designation will also remain a focus. The Commission may also add new initiatives to the list as the current projects are completed or opportunities arise.

Outreach and Programming Strategy for this District

In addition to system-wide outreach efforts, the Commission is focusing on better engaging under-represented entities in the planning process in this district. Albert Lea and western counties are targeted areas in this regard.

This district will also experiment with innovative ways of *Connecting People to the Outdoors* through partnerships with public schools and non-governmental organizations. The National Eagle Center in Wabasha, the International Owl Center in Houston, the Arts Campus in Lanesboro, Project GO (Get Outdoors), and Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center are among potential program providers that could afford access to new user groups. As home to many new immigrant populations, teaming with Rochester Public Schools can facilitate outreach to, and engagement with, these communities and enable an assessment of needs, interests, and values relative to outdoor recreation. The district will continue to pilot, promote, and evaluate the effectiveness of destination nature playscapes and the use of information technology to attract young audiences. Further, there is the promising possibility of collaborating with the Mayo Clinic on a public relations campaign around the "Nature Rx" and "Vitamin N (nature)" movement.

4. System Costs and Funding

System Costs and Funding is a work in progress and will be available under separate document.

5. System-Wide Planning Initiatives

The Commission is undertaking select planning initiatives to address specific *system-wide* planning needs common across Greater Minnesota. Some of these are standalone studies that will be completed in a defined timeframe, while others are the start of planning processes that will evolve over time.

The following are the current initiatives the Commission is pursuing, in no particular order of priority. All of these relate to various types of trails since that is the most pressing issue in all of the districts. The timing of these will be determined by the Commission consistent with organizational capacity and resources.

Statewide Plan for Mountain Bike Facilities

A number of promising proposals have been submitted for mountain bike trails that highlight planning issues such as:

- Demand for mountain bike facilities in the northeast and Duluth area
- Role of Detroit Mountain as a mountain bike destination facility
- Expanding Cuyuna mountain bike trail system as a collaboration with local cities and MN DNR, with goal being to leverage funding to maximize this venue as a nationally-recognized destination

Key aspects of the study include:

- Evaluate the demand for *destination* mountain bike trail facilities in Greater Minnesota, with the focus being on determining the role of regional level providers in meeting the demand; how local trail projects integrate into the larger statewide system would also be defined
- Define optimal geographical distribution of destination mountain bike facilities at the regional level
- Use recognized design standards to ensure that high quality, sustainable trails are built

- Establish funding priorities to “build-out” the system to ensure that funding allocations at the regional level are well coordinated and complementary to other systems; the goal is to continue to build on Minnesota’s growing reputation as a nationally-recognized mountain bike destination

Possible partners in this study include advocacy groups, MN DNR, and Metro Regional Parks.

Motorized Trails Framework

Addressing the demand for motorized trails is an increasingly important issue in Greater Minnesota, especially in districts 1 and 2. (Note: “motorized” includes snowmobiles, ATVs, OHM, ORV, etc.) The demand for motorized trails relates to recreational uses along with providing access to natural areas for those with less mobility and the elderly.

To begin the process, the Commission is undertaking two initiatives at the district level. The first is the Prospector Trail prototype in District 1, and the second is a motorized trail planning study in District 2. (Each of these is defined under *3.District-Level Strategic Directions*.) The outgrowth of these initiatives will be a better understanding of GMRPTC’s role in addressing the demand for motorized trails and a framework on how to move forward with other partners, including MN DNR, advocacy groups (e.g., MRTUA) and the motorized industry.

Water Trails Framework

As with motorized trails, addressing the demand for water trails is an increasingly important issue in Greater Minnesota across all districts. To begin the process, the Commission is undertaking an initiative in District 6, the Southern Minnesota Water Trail. (This is defined under *3.District-Level Strategic Directions*.)

Defining the parameters around creating a water trail following the Minnesota River will also be considered, with the focus on how to best coordinate with cities and counties along river; accessing the level of enthusiasm for creating this water trail; defining regional versus local responsibilities; and then establishing a work plan to create a master plan if warranted.

This initiative will inform GMRPTC’s role in addressing the demand for water trails and provide a framework on how to move forward with other partners, including MN DNR Trails and Waterways and advocacy groups. The potential to enhance the use of water trails through programming and partnerships with advocacy groups will also be assessed.

Non-Motorized Paved Trails Framework

Developing guiding principles or baseline standards for paved trails within and across districts is increasingly important. Some of the issues include:

- Defining the difference between a local, regional, and state trail
- Determining how many regional trails per district are affordable and sustainable
- Determining the value-added benefit of one trail type versus another – such as long distance trails versus localized trails, looped trails versus out-and-back

Defining how the regional trail classification interfaces with MN DNR’s definition for a state-level trail is an especially fundamental question that must be addressed.

To begin the process, the Commission is undertaking several initiatives, including the Heartland Trail corridor planning in District 3, the Casey Jones Trail corridor planning in District 5, and regional trail system planning in Districts 4 and 5. (Each of these is defined under *3.District-Level Strategic Directions*.) These initiatives will inform GMRPTC’s role in providing regional level trails and provide a framework on how to move forward with other partners, especially MN DNR.

Statewide Plan for Connecting People to the Outdoors

Working with the Legacy Advisory Committee, the Commission will initiate collaboration with DNR and Met Council to develop a comprehensive plan for *Connecting People to the Outdoors*. The plan will be derived from recommendations in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*:

- Provide a welcoming environment
- Make facilities and amenities accessible and affordable
- Engage and motivate target audiences through marketing
- Ensure high-quality experiences for park visitors and trail users
- Sponsor engaging programs and events that foster lifelong participation

6. Performance Measurement and Research Initiatives

Performance Measurement Initiatives

As defined in the strategic plan, the Commission is committed to taking a broad-based approach to performance measurement to ensure that investments made in the regional system over time meet or exceed expectations. The Commission also wants to measure the performance of investments *relative to the expectations for a given facility in a particular situation and setting*, which will likely vary from district to district.

Measuring how well an investment performs relative to the public values defined under 2. *Key Strategic Directions* – i.e., recreational opportunities, economic development, tourism, health and wellness, and intrinsic values – is also important to the Commission to make informed investment decisions on a more encompassing definition of public values. While it remains important, the Commission’s need for performance information goes well beyond simply counting visitors.

Key parameters around developing measurement tools include:

- **Reliable** – all measurement tools need to be statistically-reliable relative to the planning need;
- **Practical** – measurement tools need to be reasonable to develop and implement, cost effective and usable in varying Greater Minnesota contexts
- **Technology-based** – to maximize efficiency, reliability and practicality relative to manual approaches (i.e., people-based counting, etc.)
- **Quantitative and qualitative information** – in addition to visitor counts, will assess how well a facility meets design standards, user expectations, fits into the regional context, adds intrinsic value, etc. to paint a broader picture of public value

Developing a toolkit of performance measurement tools will take time, and this plan is the first step in that direction. Key initiatives under this plan include:

- **Developing a collaborative framework with partners** – to fully assess the potential for jointly developing reliable measurement tools with MN DNR and Metro Parks; outcome is an understanding of collaborative opportunities and a clear strategy on developing the tools, timelines, and funding mechanism; importantly, measurement tools must go beyond current visitors counting methods and all tools must be useful in Greater Minnesota; this assessment will define collaborative opportunities, along with clarifying where GMRPTC’s best interest is in developing its own tools
- **Trail-based visitor counting system** – this is a pressing need given the emphasis on developing trails in all districts; goal is to develop a reliable and cost effective technology-based trail user counting tool to better understand how trails are actually used and what type of trails are best suited for different regional settings

Research Initiatives

The initial step in creating a research library has been completed and is available on GMRPTCs website. The goal of the library is two-fold:

- Make pertinent park and trail-related research, planning and design standards, demographic information, etc. readily available to the Commission, DPCs, Greater Minnesota cities and counties and advocacy groups
- Begin to define shortcomings and limitations of current research, and determine subject areas where research initiatives are most needed

Next steps under this plan include:

- **Outlining the types of research most needed, and establishing implementation priorities** – better positioning park and trail planners and designers to understand emerging trends and design ideas is a particular area of focus to improve outdoor experiences and encourage higher levels of participation in outdoor recreation
- **Developing a collaborative framework with partners** – to determine opportunities for jointly undertaking research initiatives with MN DNR and Metro Parks; outcome is an understanding of collaborative opportunities and a clear strategy on moving forward; this assessment will define collaborative opportunities, along with clarifying where GMRPTC's best interest is in moving forward on its own

APPENDIX:

Statewide and District Potential System Plan Maps

&

District Demographic Trends

Introduction

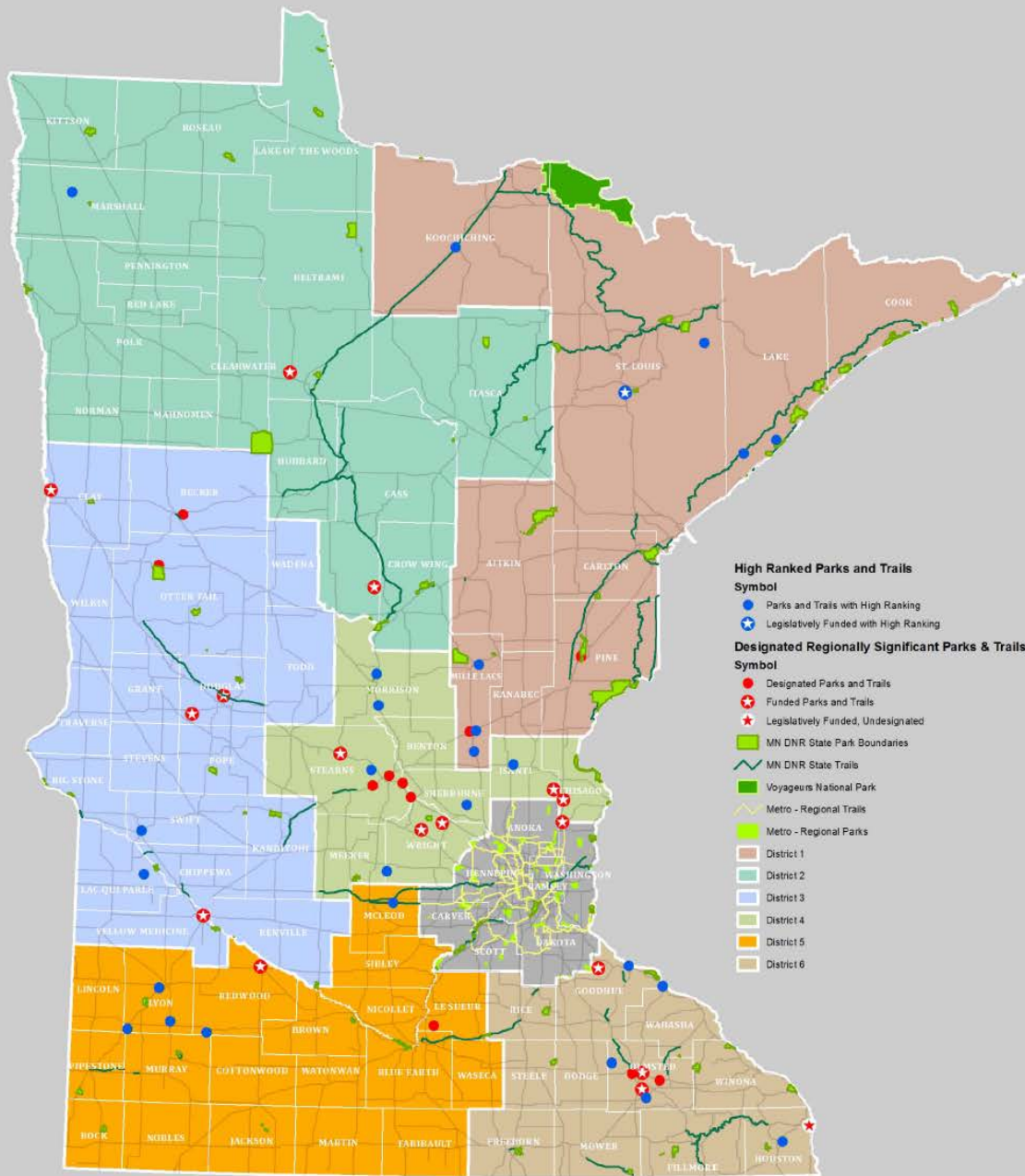
The following background information is organized on a district-by-district basis. A series of maps and narratives provide background data supporting the 2016 GMRPTC System Plan, including maps of the current state of the designated and potential system. This information is made available for policy makers, practitioners, Commissioners, committee members, and the public to better understand some of the underlying trends and development opportunities that support the statewide plan.

Additional information and data tables as used in this appendix may be available by contacting GMRPTC staff or Commissioners.

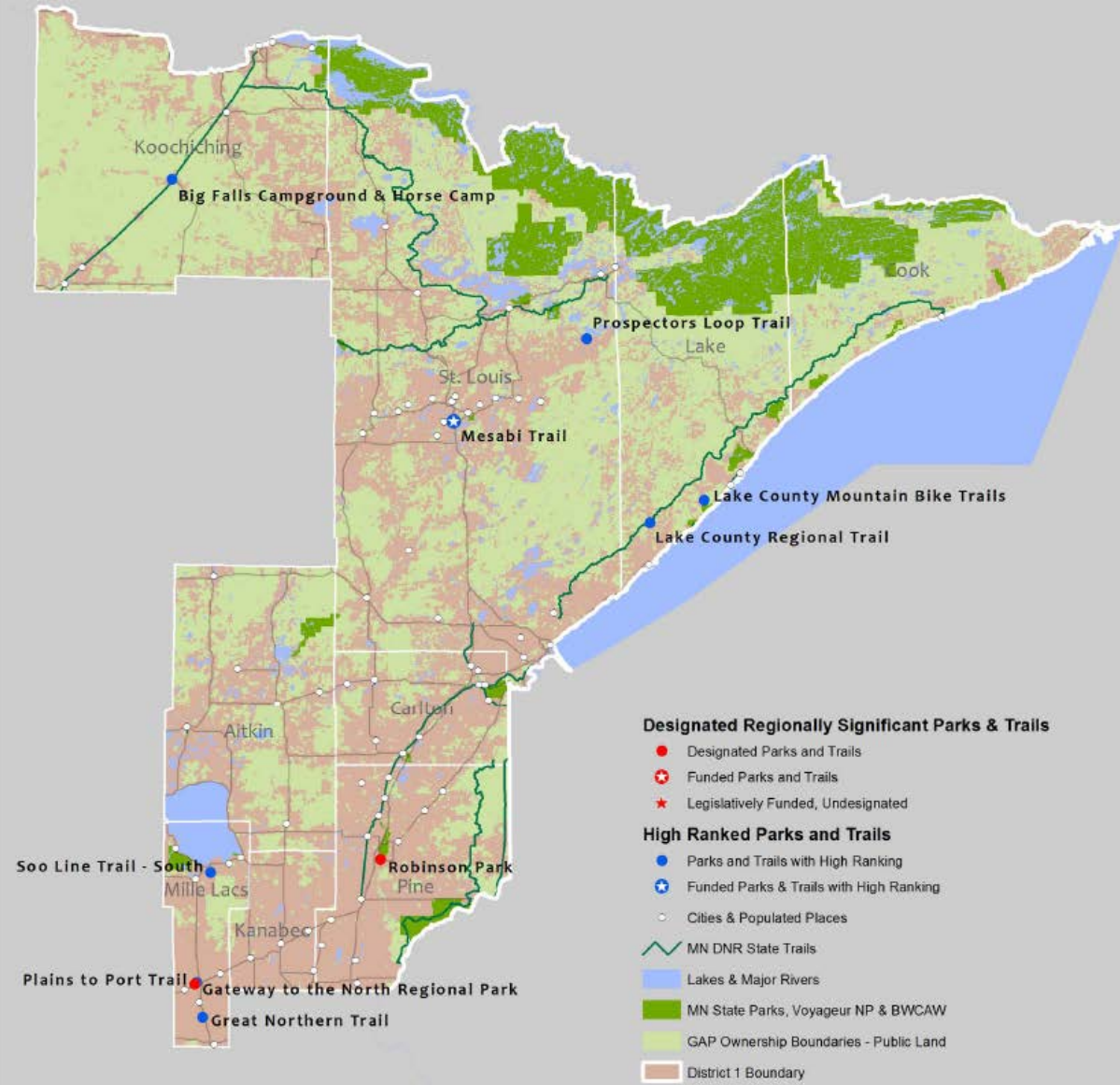
Demographic data is attributable to the Minnesota State Demographer's website, <http://mn.gov/admin/demography/>. Conclusions drawn from the data available are attributable to Commission staff and may be updated, modified, improved or expanded at any time.

Contents	Page
Statewide 2016 Potential System Map	A - 3
District 1 Potential System Map	A - 4
District 1 Population Map	A - 5
District 1 Demographic Analysis	A - 5
District 2 Potential System Map	A - 6
District 2 Population Map	A - 7
District 2 Demographic Analysis	A - 7
District 3 Potential System Map	A - 8
District 3 Population Map	A - 9
District 3 Demographic Analysis	A - 9
District 4 Potential System Map	A - 10
District 4 Population Map	A - 11
District 4 Demographic Analysis	A - 11
District 5 Potential System Map	A - 12
District 5 Population Map	A - 13
District 5 Demographic Analysis	A - 13
District 6 Potential System Map	A - 14
District 6 Population Map	A - 15
District 6 Demographic Analysis	A - 15

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission 2016 Potential System



District System - District 1

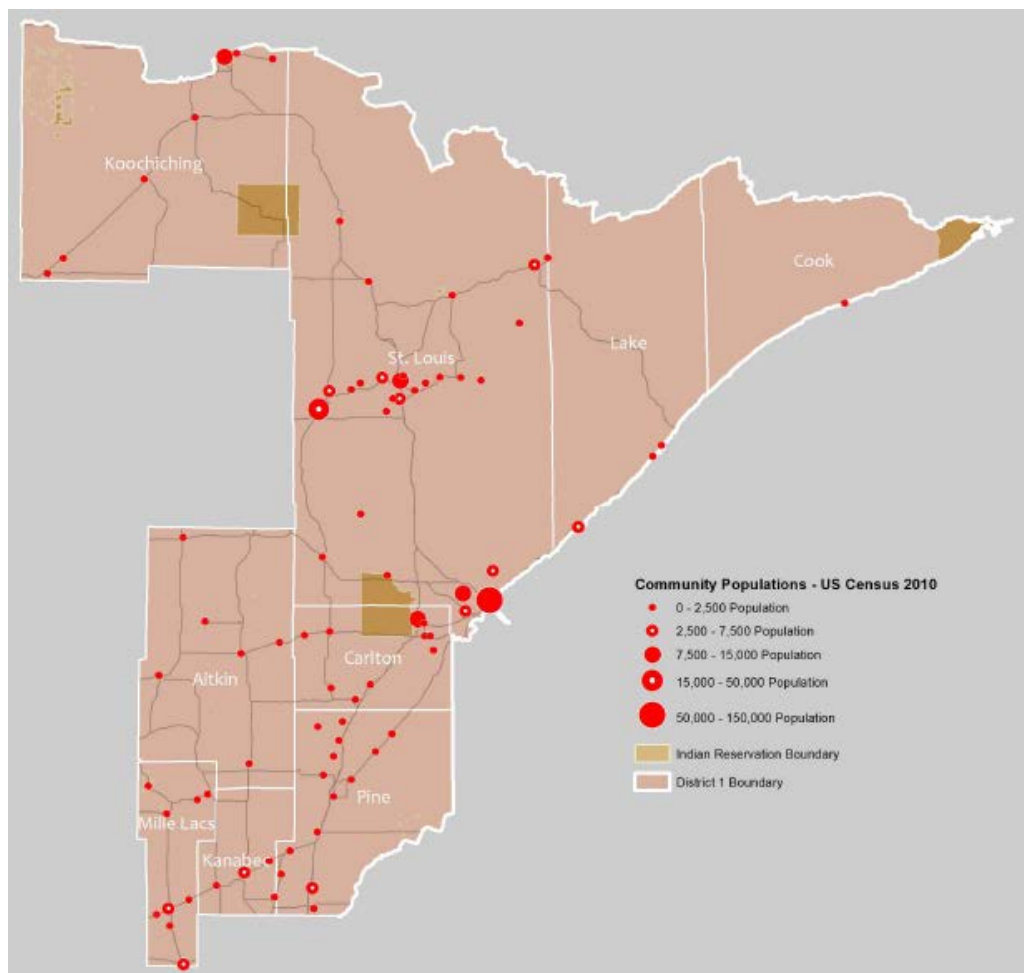


District 1

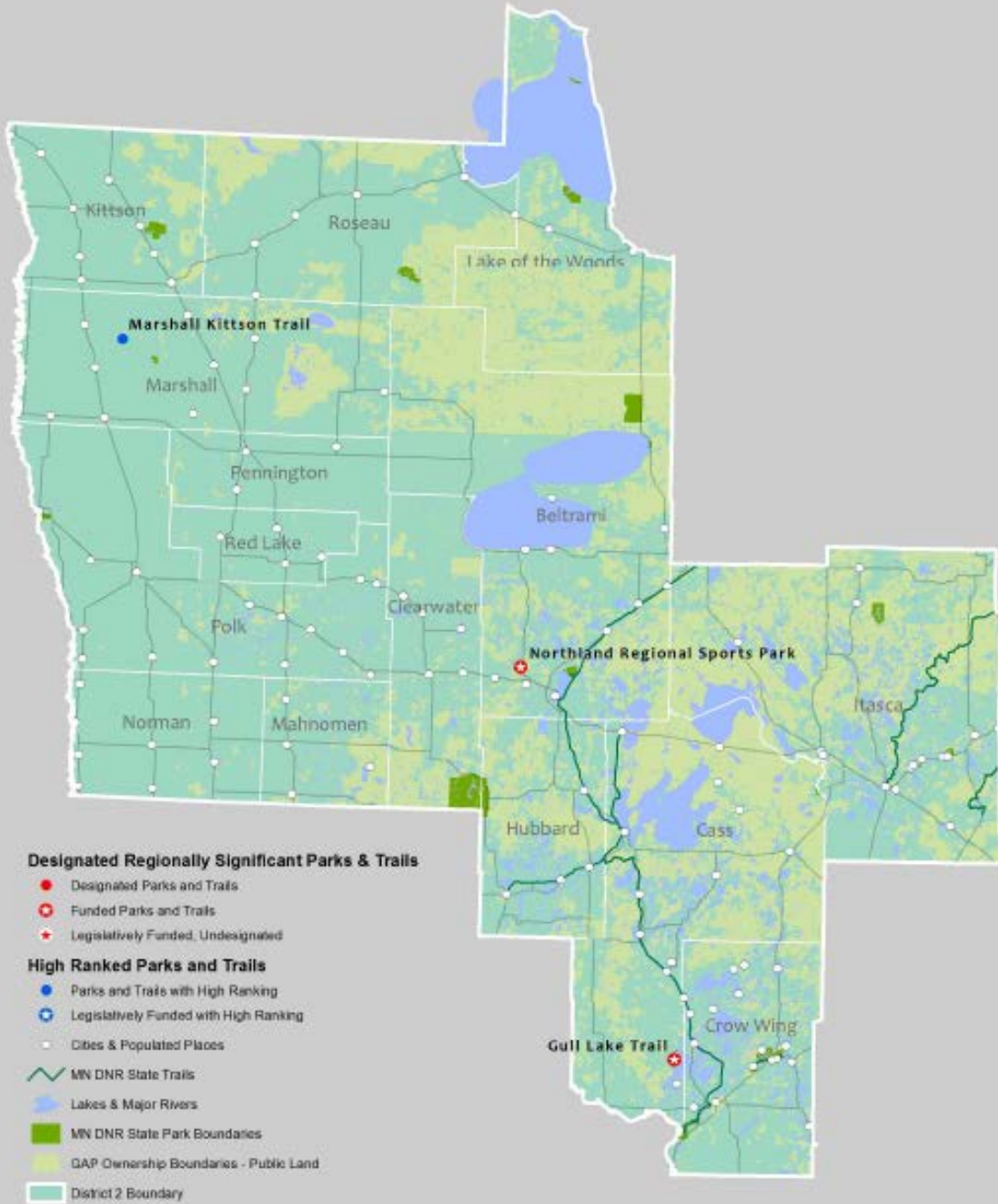
The 2014 estimated population of the northeastern district is 352,146, a decrease of -0.3% since the 2010 census. As many park and trail facilities have an estimated lifespan of 30 years, population projections out to 2045 have some value. State Demographer projections for 2045 in this district show a decline of -1.6% from the 2010 census. Between 2010 and 2014, there was a natural decrease of 109 persons; there was also a negative total domestic and international immigration pattern of -850 people, even with a positive international immigration sub-trend of 1,036 people.

Discussions across the GMRPTC system focus on the characteristics of the population, both current and in the future, which may indicate changes in system demand over time. Population age characteristics indicate that between 2015 and 2045, the under-20 population will shrink by -9.8%, while the 60+ age bracket will increase by 24.1% in District 1. Relevant race and ethnicity data from the State Demographer is aggregated by Regional Development Commission area, which serves as a rough proxy for District boundaries. Using demographer estimates for Regions 3 and 7E, this area has a 2015 minority population of 7.9%; 23% of the total population change by 2035 will be minority-driven. While this proxy data does provide insights into the potential growth of the minority population for D1, the data is not a perfect fit, as it also shows an overall population increase over that time, contrary to district-specific data.

In 2014, 15.6% of the population lived below the poverty line. An average of county median incomes for this district is \$47,045, which is the lowest income among all the districts. A similarly calculated unemployment average of 7.6% is the highest among all districts. While useful as a comparison, this data should not be taken as a true average, as the data that would allow such a calculation was beyond the scope of this research.



District System - District 2

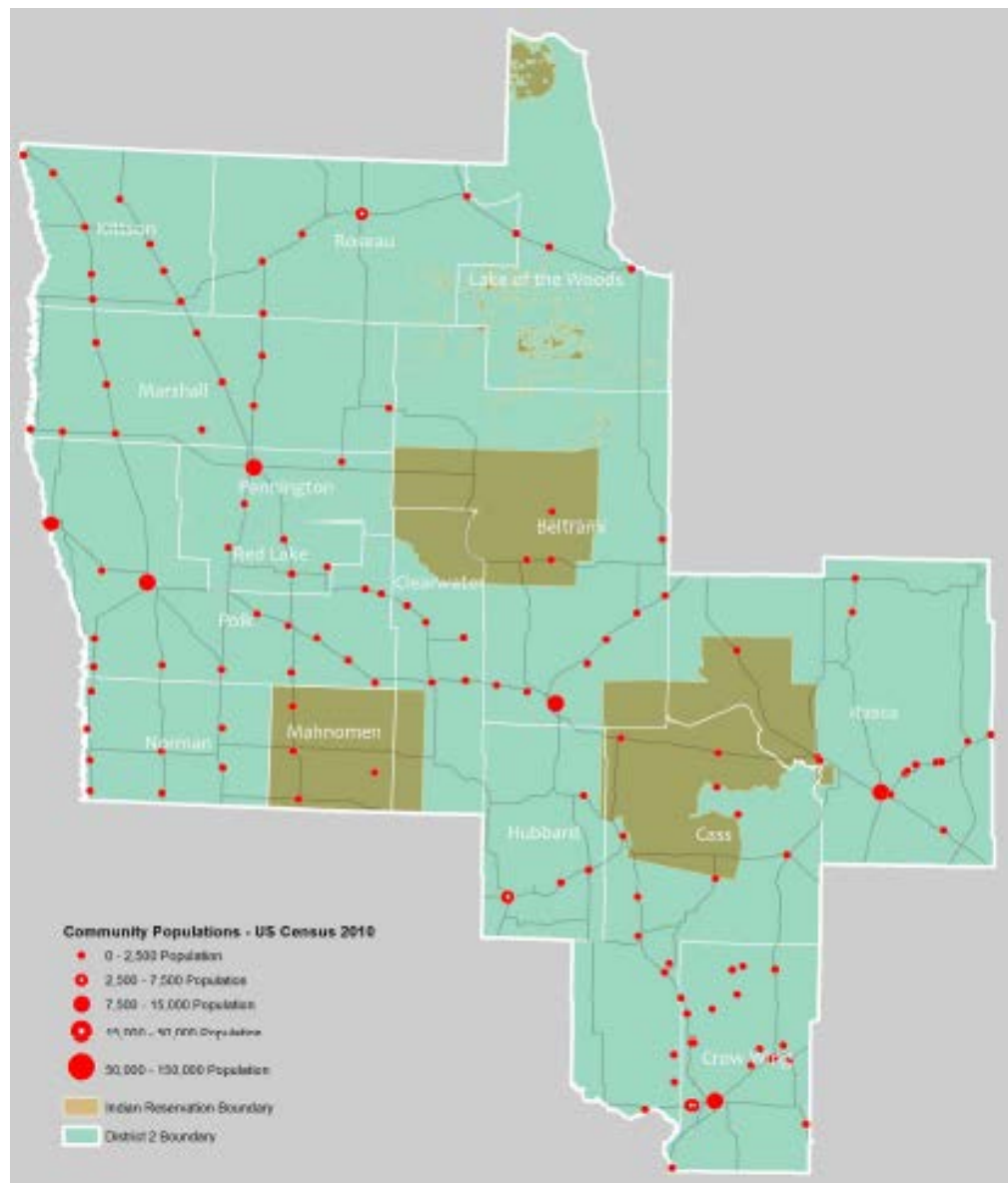


District 2

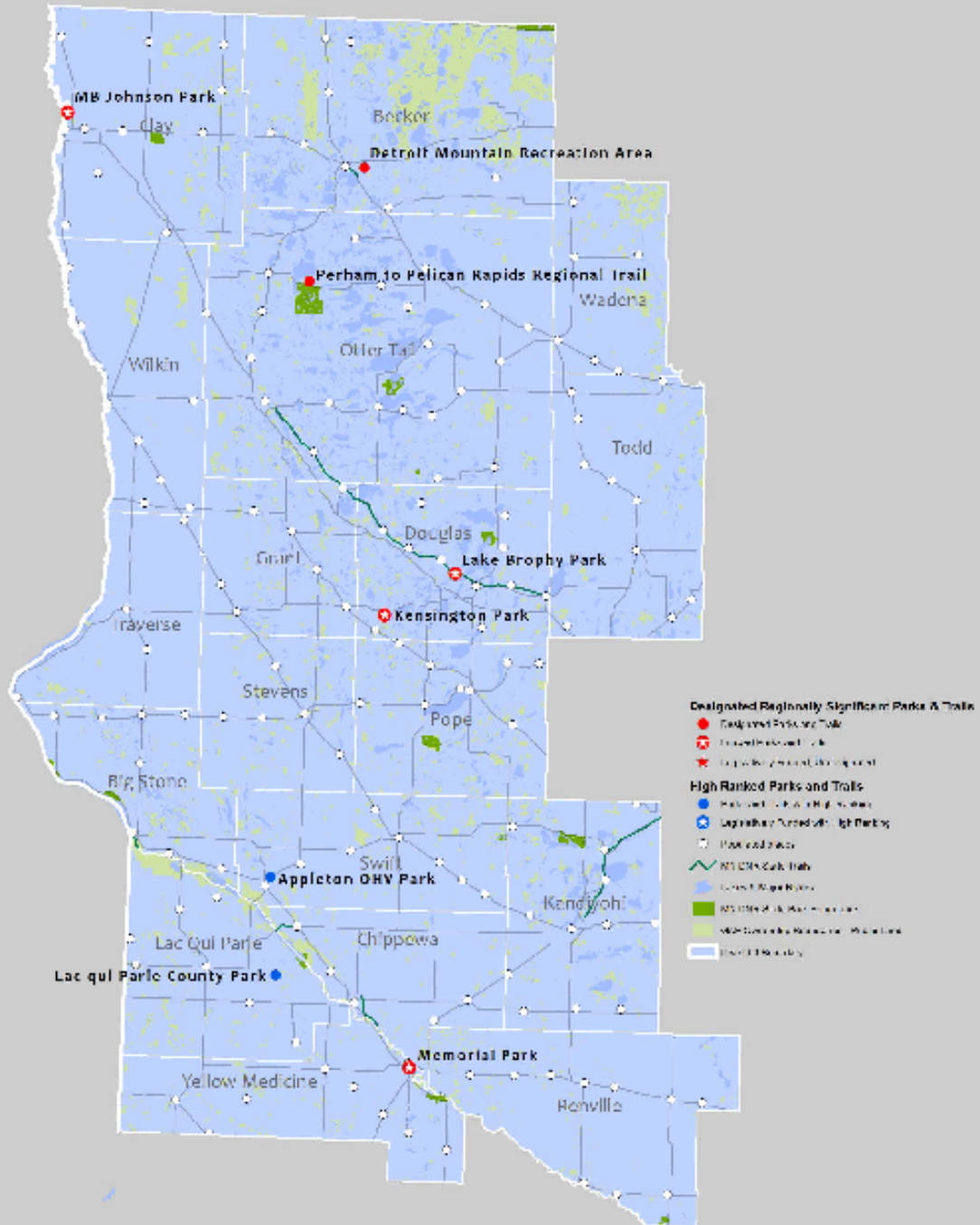
The 2014 estimated population of the northwest district is 308,042, a 0.9% increase since the 2010 census. State Demographer projections for 2045 in District 2 indicate growth of 7.8%. Between 2010 and 2014, there was a natural (births over deaths) increase of 3,137. Net immigration over that period (both domestic and foreign) is estimated at -356, including international immigration of +60 people.

Population age characteristics indicate several areas of growth. Most notably for many outdoor recreation planning discussions, this district will see an 8.5% increase in the under-20 years old population, as well as a 19.4% increase in those 60+ years old. Demographer estimates for Regions 1 and 2 (similar to the boundaries of D2) show a 2015 minority population of 14.7%. By 2035, 56.7% of the population growth will be driven by minorities, resulting in minority populations of 12.1% in Region 1 (west) and 22.6% in Region 2 (east).

In 2014, 13.9% of the District 2 population lived below the poverty line. An average of county median incomes for this district is \$47,283, among the lowest of the districts. County unemployment rates across the district averages out to 6.2%.



District System - District 3

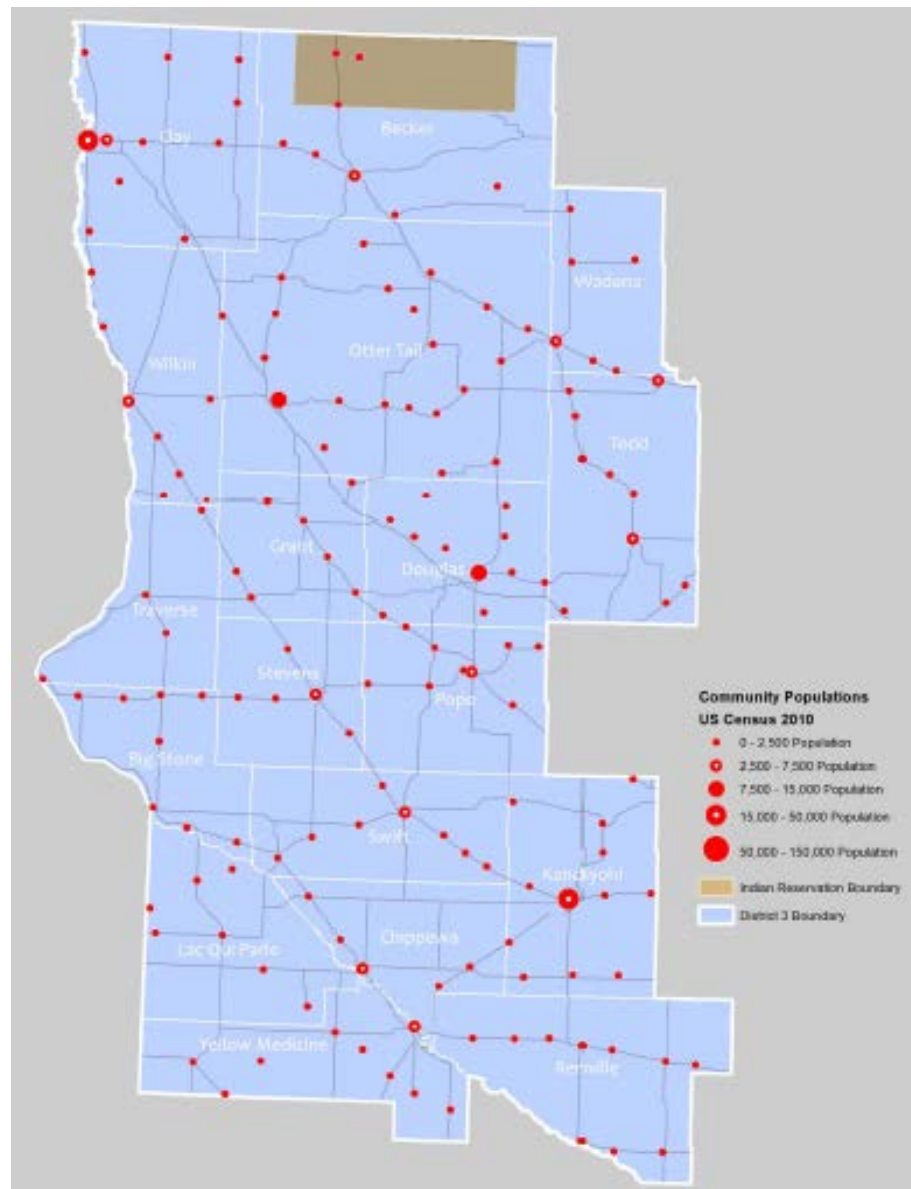


District 3

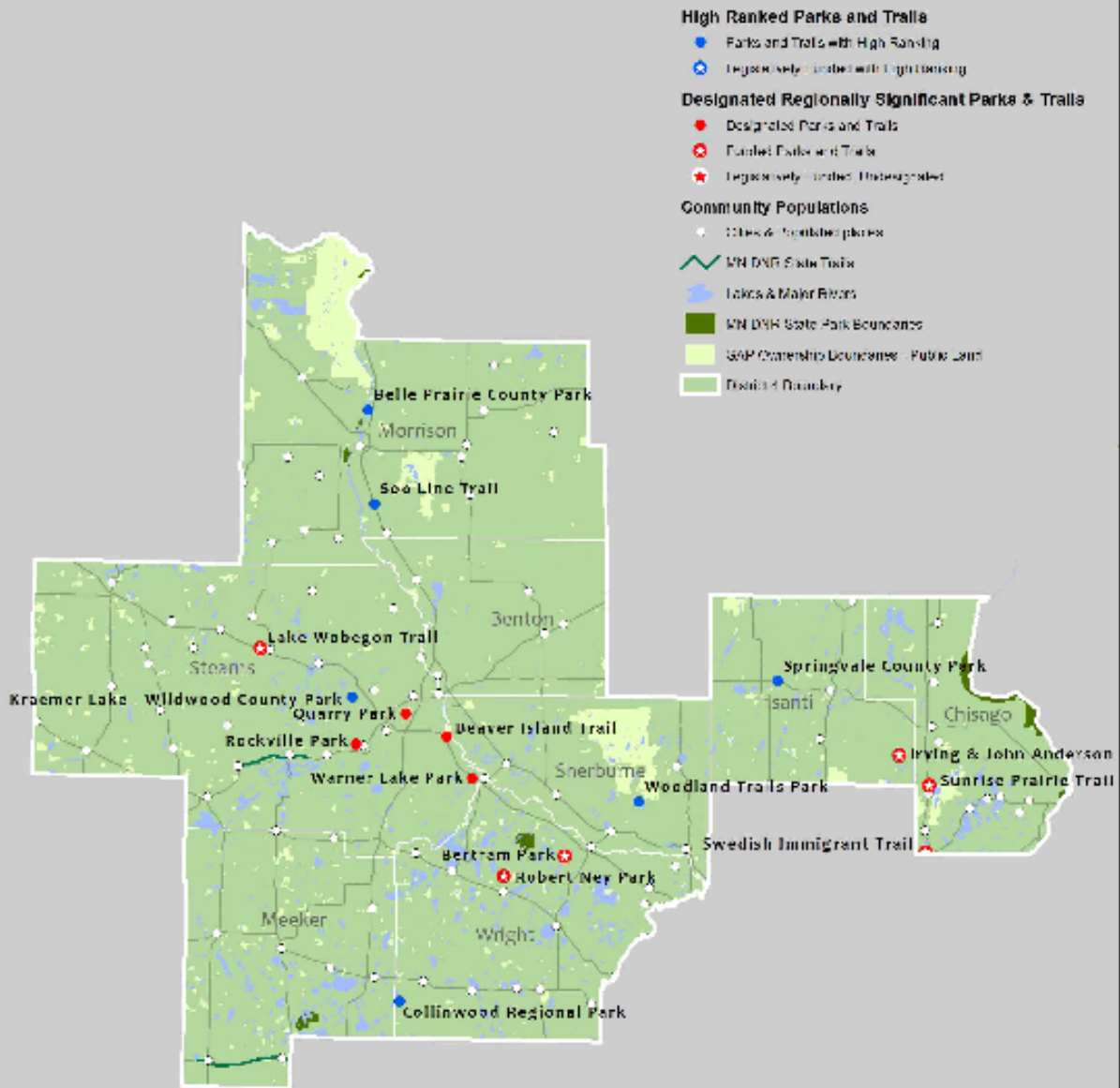
Population estimates for the west-central district are 365,128 (2014), an increase of 0.3% over the 2010 census. By 2045, the state demographer estimates population growth of 7.7% in this district. Growth characteristics in this district are similar to elsewhere, with 2010-2014 natural increases of 2,790. Net immigration (foreign and domestic) was -1,870, even with net international immigration of 1,337.

As the population ages through 2045, state demographer estimates show fairly average growth in the under-20 age group of 5.0%. The senior 60+ age bracket will see growth of 23.2%, also in the middle of the pack among the districts. Regions 4 and 6W (an area similar to D3) show a 2015 minority population of 7.8%; however, 44.1% of the population change by 2035 will be minority driven. By 2035, 9.5% of Region 4 and 15.3% of Region 6W will be minority, compared to 7.4% and 10.0% in 2015.

Poverty (income) levels in this district are in the middle of all districts, at 12.4% (2014). An average of median county incomes across the district is \$50,094. A similar average of county unemployment rates for 2014 is 4.6%.



District System - District 4

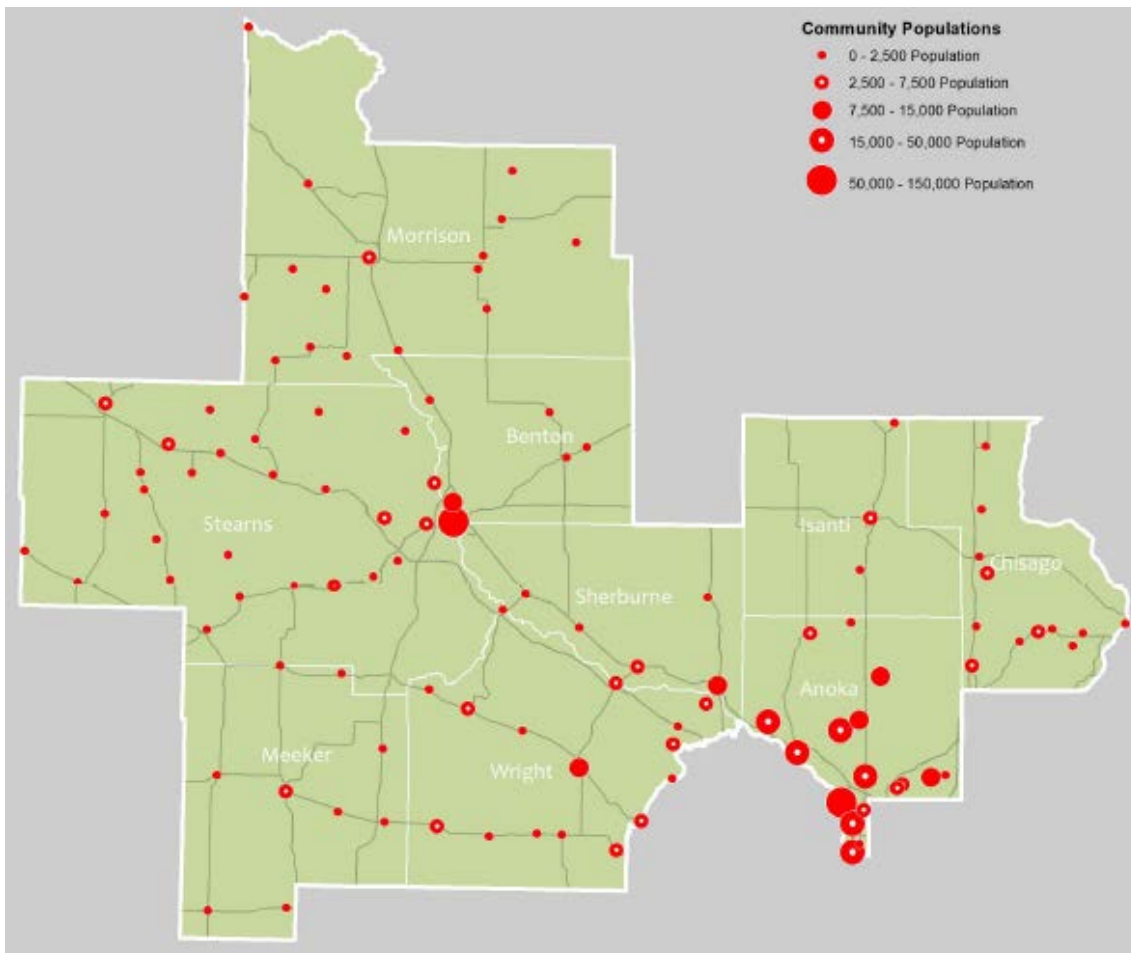


District 4

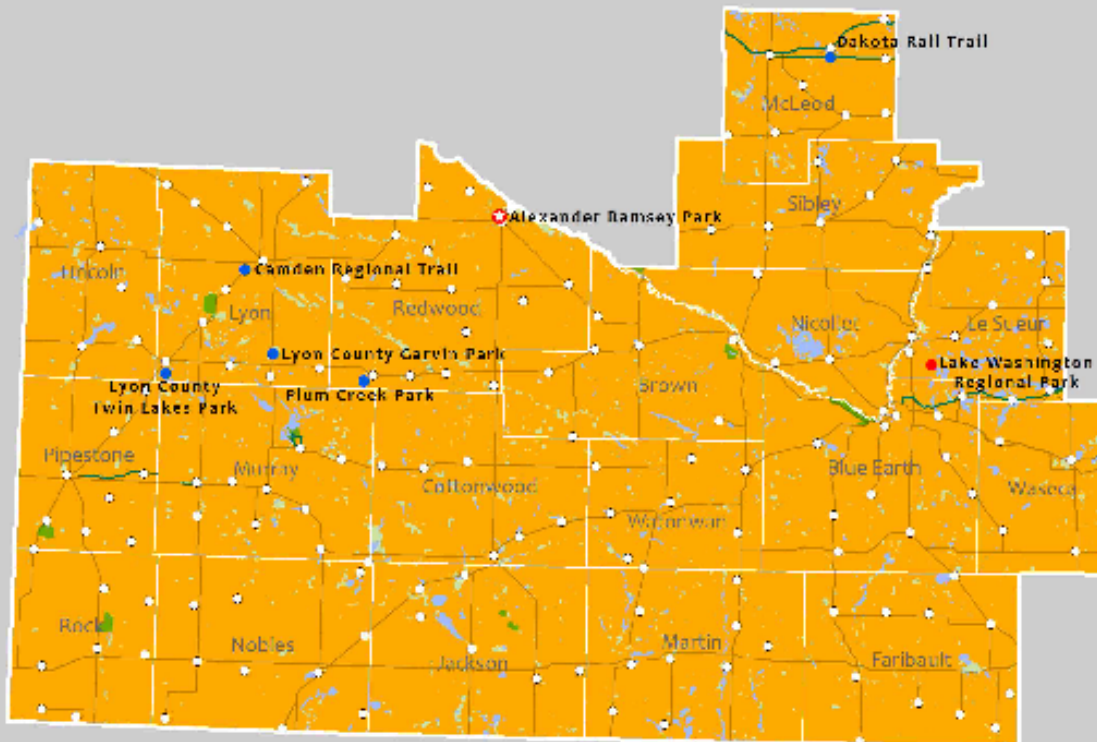
The central Greater Minnesota district is known to be the largest and fastest growing, and the data supports that assumption. State demographer estimates for 2014 place the population at 562,525, which is growth over 2010 of 2.2%. Projected growth by 2045 is the strongest among the districts, at 23.2%. Population change characteristics from 2010-2014 reflect a natural (birth/death) net increase of 14,148. However, there is a negative net immigration pattern of -3,961 people, even with a positive international immigration trend of 1,779 people.

Age projections by 2045 indicate typical growth in the under-20 years old population of 6.7%. However, the over-60 years old population is expected to increase by an astounding 101.3%. A racial and ethnic population estimate for 2015, using Region 7W as a geographic approximation, indicate that 8.1% of the district population is a minority. Given the strong growth of the district, it is also notable that only 20.2% of the 2035 population increase is driven by minorities. In Region 7W, 11.9% of the 2035 population will be minority, compared to 8.1% in 2015.

The 2014 income estimates for this district indicate the best performance in Greater Minnesota, with an estimated 9.6% living below the poverty line. Similarly, the average of county median incomes is strong at \$60,888. However, an average of county unemployment rates is fairly high at 6.6%



District System - District 5



High Ranked Parks and Trails

Symbol

- Parkland Trails with High Funding
- ⊕ Legislatively Funded with High Funding

Designated Regionally Significant Parks & Trails

Symbol

- Designated Parks and Trails
- ⊕ Funded Parks and Trails
- ⊕ Legislatively Funded, Undergranted

○ Cities & Unincorporated places

~ MN DNR State Trails

~ Lakes & Major Rivers

~ MN DNR State Park Boundaries

~ CAD Ownership Boundaries - Public Land

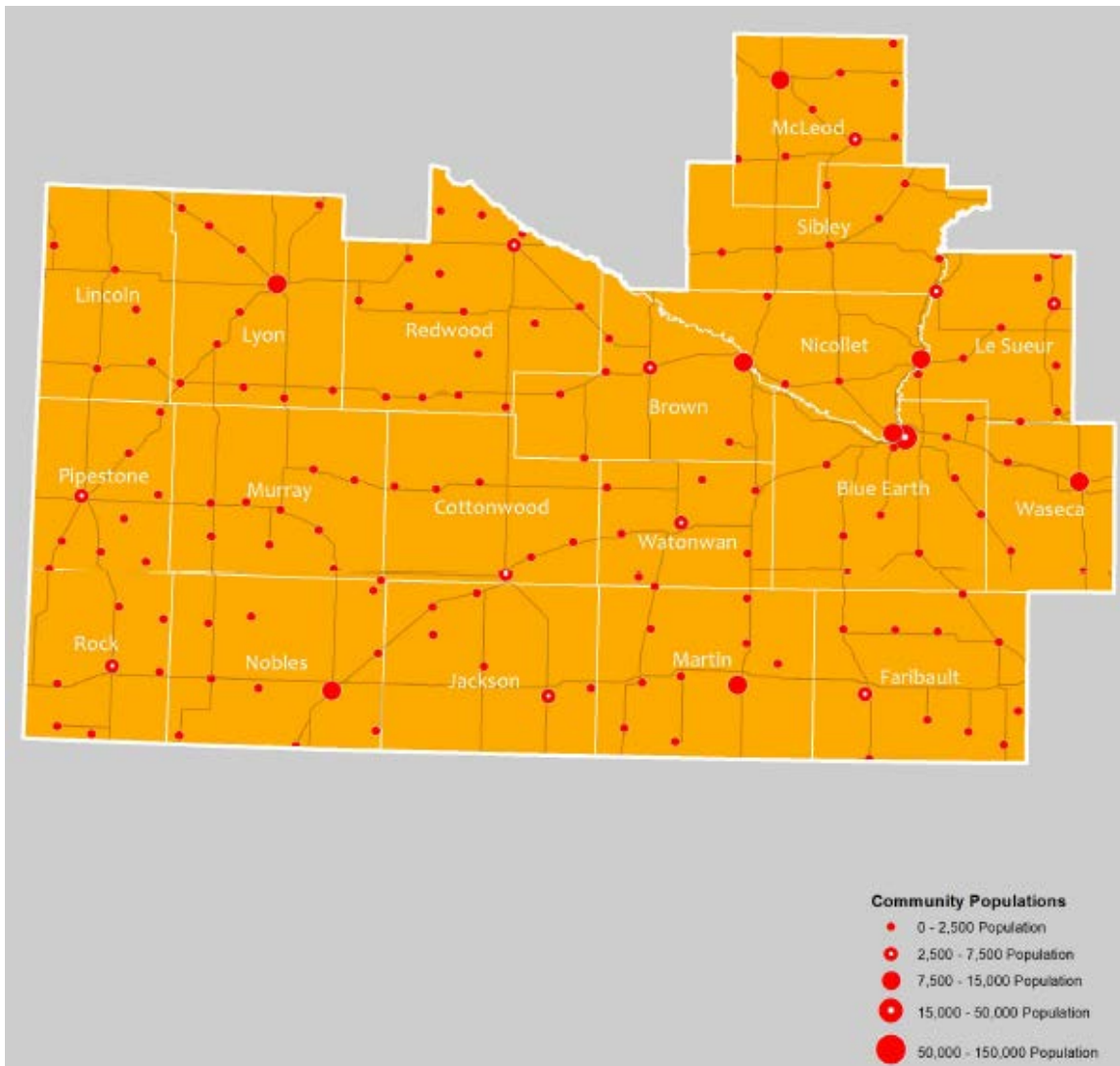
~ Wildland Boundary

District 5

Population growth in the southwest district is the weakest in the Greater Minnesota at -0.4% between 2010 and 2014, for a total of 385,574. However, growth is projected to return, with a 7.9% increase by 2045. Net natural population increases of 4,488 from 2010 to 2014 were countered by strong net negative total immigration of -6,997, even with positive international immigration of 1,868.

District 5 age characteristics show a projected decline in the 2045 19-and-under age group of -2.6%, while the 60+ age group will increase by 38.4%, third strongest in Greater Minnesota. Regions 8 and 9 surrogate race and ethnicity information show a 2015 minority population of 12.1%. However, 178.4% of the growth by 2035 is driven by minorities, showing the largest impact on growth of any district. In 2035 minority population in Region 8 will be 22.3%, and 16.5% in Region 9, versus 2015 levels of 14.4% and 10.9% respectively.

Income below poverty is average among the districts, at 12.3% of the population. An average of county median incomes stands at \$51,657, third best in Greater Minnesota, while the average of county unemployment rates is 4.8% among the lowest reported (2014).



District System - District 6



High Ranked Parks and Trails

- Symbol**
- Designated Parks and Trails with High Ranking
 - ⊕ Legally Funded with High Ranking

Designated Regionally Significant Parks & Trails

- Symbol**
- Designated Parks and Trails
 - ⊕ Funded Parks and Trails
 - ★ Legally Funded, Undesignated

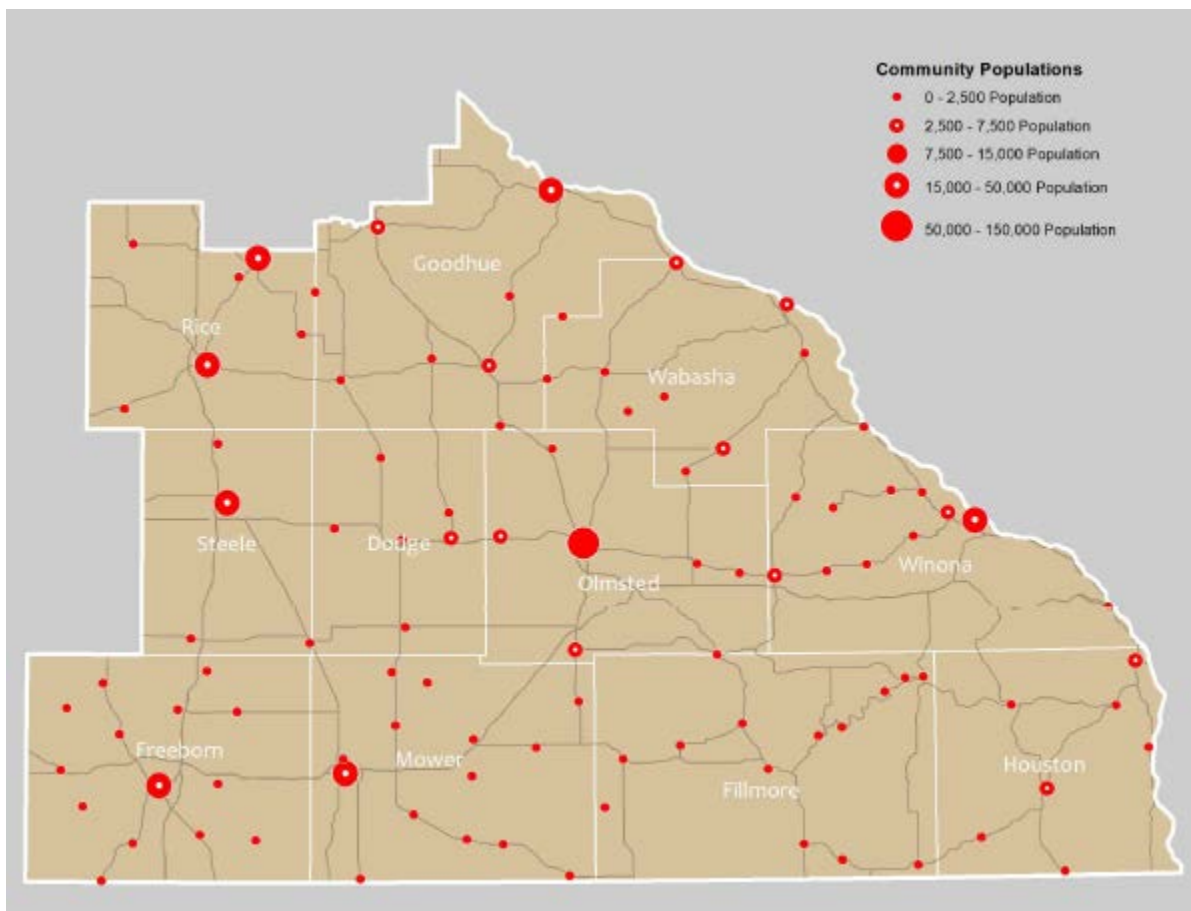
- ⬢ Cities & Incorporated Places
- ⬢ MN DNR State Parks
- ⬢ Lakes & Major Rivers
- ⬢ MN DNR State Park Boundaries
- ⬢ GSP (Minnesota) Landowner - Public Land
- ⬢ District Boundary

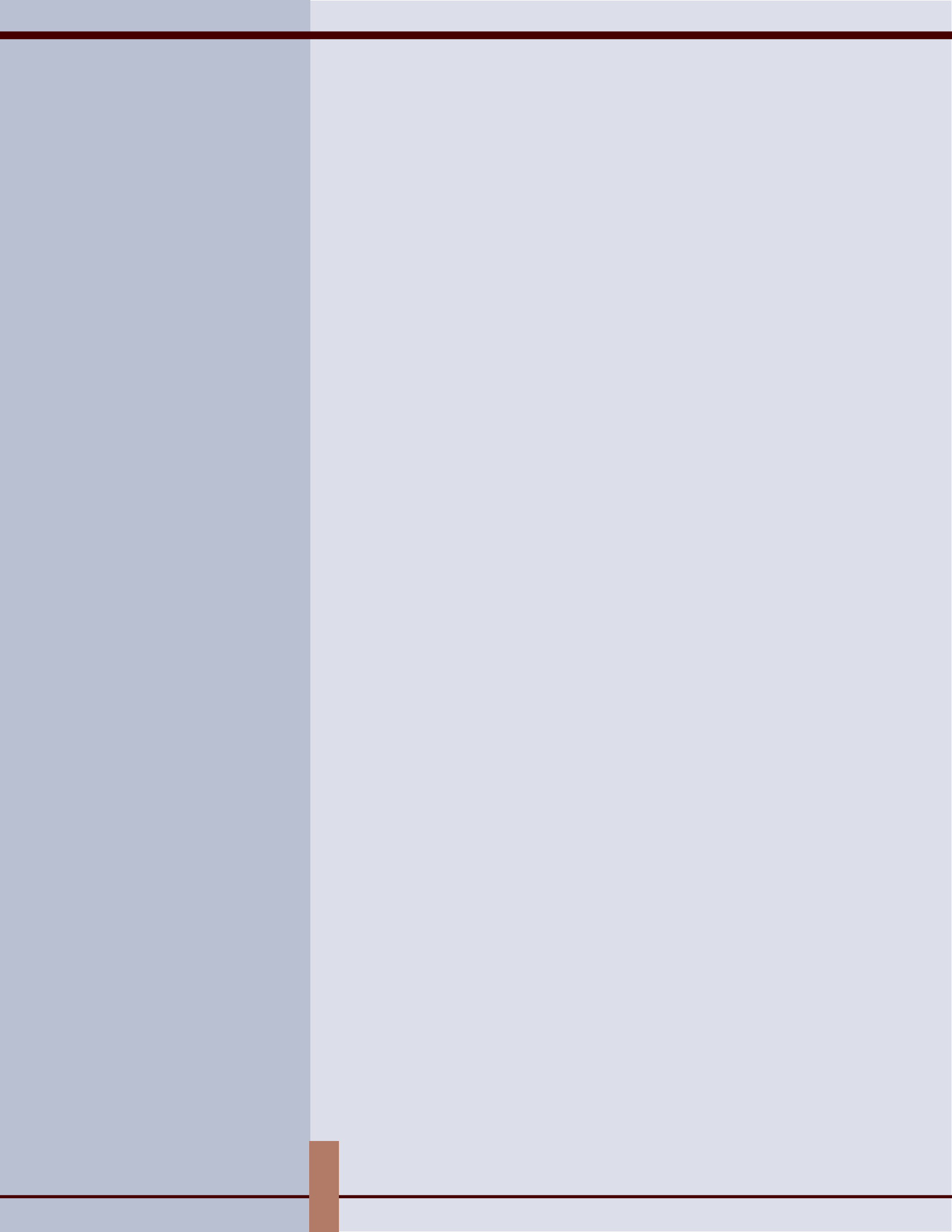
District 6

The southeastern district has the second highest population at 500,966 (2014), with a growth rate of 1.3% since 2010. Projected growth by 2045 is 14.6%, second strongest in Greater Minnesota. Much of that growth is illustrated by a net natural increase (births/deaths) of 9,112 people from 2010-2014. A negative total immigration trend of -3,184 masks the strongest international immigration trend in Greater Minnesota of 4,071 people in that same timeframe.

The under-20 age bracket shows fairly typical growth of 5.9% by 2045. However, the over-60 age bracket will see very robust growth of 54.5%. In 2015, the minority population of geographically-similar Region 10 is 13.2%; 63.3% of the 2035 population change will be driven by minorities, second highest in Greater Minnesota. Total minority representation in the Region 10 population will grow to 19.4% by 2035.

Economic data shows that 10.8% of the 2014 population lived below the poverty line, second lowest in Greater Minnesota. Income was also second highest, with an average of county median incomes at \$54,492. An average of county unemployment rates (2014) is third lowest in Greater Minnesota at 5.7%.





2016 GREATER MINNESOTA
REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS
SYSTEM PLAN AND WORK PLAN

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS
AND TRAILS COMMISSION